

Cluff, William Joseph. Sapper.

6-E-8



William Joseph Cluff was born on May 4, 1917, in Binscarth, Manitoba.

He was the son of William Hugh Cluff and Jesse McIntosh Cluff. The 1931 census listed Jessie McIntosh Cluff as the head of the household and William Joseph as the son and only child.

The mother is listed in the birth records as Jessie McIntosh Reid. It is reported that William Joseph had two considerably older half-brothers and half-sisters from his mother's previous marriage.

William Joseph was nicknamed "Charlie" during his service, but was called "Chuck" in other units. Family circles simply called him William.

He had completed school through Grade 12. He reported that he had been a chauffeur, spoke only English, and was generally interested in sports.

William enlisted for active duty on October 21, 1943, in Portage la Prairie. Before that, he had already served as a conscript under the N.R.M.A. from March 1942.

To clarify:

The National Resources Mobilization Act was passed 21 June 1940 by Parliament.

It represented the government's response to the public clamour for a more effective Canadian war effort that arose in the wake of the stunning German victories in Belgium and France.

The Act enabled the government to requisition the property and services of Canadians for home defence. An earlier promise made by PM Mackenzie King in 1939 not to introduce conscription for overseas service was honoured, but it was reversed in August 1942 following the national plebiscite of April 1942.

The amended NRMA permitted the sending of conscripts overseas in addition to the existing regular volunteer forces.

The NRMA was important politically as it attested to the government's determination to intensify the war effort. It tended to appease the conscriptionists without antagonizing the anti-conscriptionists.

In military affairs the Act created a duality in Canada's military that was to last until the war's end. It also resulted in the training of a large body of men for military duty.

From 1940 to 1944 close to 60 000 NRMA soldiers (the so-called "zombies") volunteered for general service, and several thousand more were sent to the front after the use of conscripts for overseas service actually began late in 1944.

William absolved several months of training in a hospital and was sent to the Royal Canadian Engineers training center at Sardis near Chilliwack, British Columbia, in May 1942.

In early 1943, William was transferred to the 2nd Fort Company of the Engineers in Halifax, Nova Scotia, which became his new station.

By the end of 1943, a new defensive battery for Halifax Harbour, named Fort Chebucto, was completed.

William was posted there in late November 1943.



Fort Chebucto

William's next transfer came in 1944. In Halifax, he was assigned to the 6th Company of the Engineers Services & Works (ES&W). Until almost the end of 1944 William joined this unit.

From November 17 until December 1944, William was allowed embarkation leave. He reported back on December 1.

He had a few days to get his things in order, as his transfer to Transit Camp No. 1 in Windsor, Nova Scotia, was scheduled for December 3. Troops were being assembled there for the crossing to the United Kingdom.

William embarked on December 23, 1944, and landed in the United Kingdom on December 31, 1944.

He was assigned to a reinforcement unit of the Royal Canadian Engineers, for short RCE.

To clarify:

Engineers are responsible for providing support during combat, including tasks such as building bridges, clearing mines, laying pipelines, and keeping routes passable.

These tasks are essential for the movement and operations of other military units.

William crossed over to mainland of Europe relatively late in the war.

On April 11, 1945, he arrived and was assigned to the 8th Field Squadron of the RCE. This unit had already gained considerable combat experience in 1944 and 1945.

According to William's file, he was Struck off Strength (*a soldier ceases to be a member of a unit because of transfer, injury or death*) on April 18, 1945, likely as a result of injuries sustained.

The unit saw action that time during the crossing of the Küsten Canal (Germany). This action lasted several days, during which the RCE units suffered many losses.

A personal diary of a member of the 8th Field Squadron mentions that Sapper William Joseph Cluff died of wounds on April 28, 1945.

He was given a temporary grave in Osterscheps (Germany); the CWGC Canadian War Cemetery in Holten became his final resting place.

The grave reference is: plot 6; Row E, grave 8.

He was awarded:

the 1939-1945 Star; the France-Germany Star; the 1939-1945 War Medal and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with clasp.

